

Scrutiny Panel



May 2015

Complaints Service Review Report

1. Introduction

SLH Scrutiny Panel's fifth service review covers SLH's approach to complaint management. The service review was agreed by the panel due to concerns over complaints satisfaction failing to hit target the inconsistencies in some of the responses provided by officers in the monthly customer feedback report reviewed by the Scrutiny Panel.

The panel set aims at the start of the review which were to support SLH to achieve:

100% satisfaction with complaint handling by:

- Ensuring complaints process is easy to access
- Supporting staff to understand its 'ok' to receive a complaint
- Making sure that the complaints process is helping to identify processes / services which are not working

This report details how the service was completed, what the findings were and recommendations for service improvement.

2. Recommendations

As a result of the review, the Scrutiny Panel make a series of recommendations (Appendix A) which have been considered by SLH and their responses are attached in the action plan.

3. Methodology

The review was carried out in six parts:

- Staff interviews
- Policy and procedure review
- Comparison with others
- Communication review
- Mystery shopping

This report will cover the findings and recommendation for the two parts of the service which the panel feel most attention needs drawing to.

4. Detail

4.1 The policy and procedure

The Scrutiny Panel feel that the existing policy and procedure are effective and on paper, aiming to deliver an excellent service. In practice the panel feels that what's is planned to happen is not always executed in the appropriate way leading to complainants being left dissatisfied and feeling their complaint was not handled as well as it could be.

This view is supported mainly by the management interviews and the review of monthly complaint responses.

Whilst the manager responsible for complaints told a picture of a great service, it conflicts with what actually happens and there is lack of consistency with application of the policy.

4.2 Learning from others

As well as looking at SLH's policy, the panel looked at the policies of both another local housing provider and some out of sector examples including:

- Royal Mail
- Nat West

Some of the learning from this review included:

- SLH's procedure is shorter than that of others who have three or four stages
- Asking what the customer wants as a result of the complaint ran through all other policies

From the review it was clear that SLH's policy and process is similar to others.

4.3 Recognising complaints

Recognising a complaint could be improved, in particular offering the choice to the complainant to make a complaint. Through the mystery shopping exercise we identified that at the first point of contact, officers are not always explicit either when offering to log a complaint or in some cases the offer of making a complaint was not made.

The panel feel that this is an area that could be strengthened by exploring the needs of the customer.

Recommendation 1: first point of contact for complainants needs to be enhanced to ensure:

- *More questioning- do you want me to log this as a formal complaint?*
- *Ensure staff show empathy and understanding whilst gaining the facts of the complaint*
- *Ensure partners such as the out of hours service and contractors understand the customer feedback process and are aware of the standard response*

4.4 Complaint handling

As detailed above, the panel that the documented process for complaint management is really good but delivery of it varies. We feel that higher satisfaction, and perhaps less complaints moving to stage 2 would be achieved, if there was greater consistency in complaint handling.

The big area we feel could be improved on is personal contact. We understand that whilst the policy emphasises this, it's not always practised. Face to face contact with the complaint should be practised as standard. This will help managers understand what the complaint is about, how the complainant feels and what they want to happen. We have seen examples of where this really brings about a positive outcome for a customer and where complaints can be escalated to stage 2 where no personal contact has been used. We would also suggest that before complaint letters are sent, a conversation is held with the customer to go over the outcome of the investigation.

Recommendation 2: *face to face contact introduced as standard for all complaints and personal contact used to discuss investigation outcomes, with the standard response used as a follow up to confirm the outcome.*

4.5 Compensation

The panel feel that whilst the compensation SLH issue is not excessive, we feel it does not always represent the best value for money and can create the wrong culture.

Whilst in some cases we understand flowers or vouchers can be a nice gesture and prevent a complaint from escalating, we feel that there is both haste at times in issuing these but also no personalisation. Is a £10 gift voucher right for everyone or can it be offensive. Whilst the panel is not suggesting more is offered, we feel that monetary gestures don't necessarily resolve the problem and can send the wrong impression.

Recommendation 3: *review approach to compensation, offering a more personalised approach and ensuring there is the right balance between an apology and value of compensation.*

4.6 Learning outcomes

We recognise that SLH want to use complaints to drive service improvement. Again the documentation points to this but we think SLH should support managers to embrace a culture of complaints as a learning experience.

As a panel when we see complaints each month there are some areas where no learning has been achieved for complaints, we would disagree with this as sometimes where the manager has reported no learning, we think that there has been.

We also don't see that learning is 'joined up'. By this we mean that we can often see the same thing recurring which indicates learning is not embedded across services.

Sometimes, we get the impression that SLH wish to shut the complaint down rather than really understand what has gone wrong, how we can learn from it and how can we put it right both for the complainant and in future.

We feel strongly that Scrutiny Panel has a role to play here in supporting learning. We would like to see assurance, in the monthly report that learning is not only achieved but is followed up. We would like to receive update reports on learning and how it's implemented. We see ourselves as the custodians of learning outcomes so we can challenge management a lot more where we are learning but the same thing goes wrong again.

Recommendation 4: *enhance monthly reporting to the Scrutiny Panel to cover learning outcomes and updates on how SLH have implemented the learning.*

Recommendation 5: *enhanced monitoring of learning outcomes will support more publicity for how SLH respond to and learn from complaints.*

Recommendation 6: *supplement the monthly report with more trend analysis to show where SLH is not learning – are we repeatedly receiving complaints about the same issue. What action will this trigger?*

5. Conclusions

Whilst SLH has the foundation to perform well in this area and satisfaction is relatively high compared to other organisations, the Scrutiny Panel feel so much more could be done.

We feel that our aim can be achieved through the recommendations made. Satisfaction, we believe will increase, with:

- A consistent approach to management of complaints across services
- Enhance a culture of complaints are 'ok'
- Strengthen learning from complaints and include Scrutiny Panel in monitoring this

Report compiled by:

SLH Scrutiny Panel

Number	Recommendation	EMT response	Status	Action to be completed by	Delivered by
1	<p>First point of contact for complainants needs to be enhanced to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More questioning- do you want me to log this as a formal complaint? • Ensure staff show empathy and understanding whilst gaining the facts of the complaint • Ensure partners such as the out of hours service and contractors understand the customer feedback process and are aware of the standard response 				
2	Face to face contact introduced as standard for all complaints and personal				

	contact used to discuss investigation outcomes, with the standard response used as a follow up to confirm the outcome				
3	Review approach to compensation, offering a more personalised approach and ensuring there is the right balance between an apology and value of compensation				
4	Enhance monthly reporting to the Scrutiny Panel to cover learning outcomes and updates on how SLH have implemented the learning				
5	Enhance monitoring of learning outcomes will support more publicity for how SLH respond to and learn from complaints				
6	Supplement the monthly report with more trend				

	analysis to show where SLH is not learning – are we repeatedly receiving complaints about the same issue. What action will this trigger?				
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